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Meaningful and effective change in education is possible only if educators are themselves psychologically able to change. This means that the profession must decide whether to accept or reject people into the next phase of the professional preparation program or into the profession itself. At least seven points in the professional time line can be identified as appropriate for such decisions: (1) admission to college or university work, (2) admission to a teacher education program, (3) admission to student teaching, (4) receipt of an education degree, (5) receipt of a teaching certificate, (6) admission to a professional position, and (7) admission to advanced training. (Author/SG)

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SEC newsletter
Strategies for Educational Change

TEACHERS: Not WILL but CAN They Change?

These are dramatic, disturbing, and dynamic times in education. More knowledge, more children, and more pressures have all forced educators to rethink educational objectives and reassess the educational effort. Most thoughtful observers would probably agree that three main ideas have emerged: (1) education has to be changed; (2) educators have been attempting change;[1] but (3) these change efforts, in general, have been less successful and less effective than the pace of the times demands.[2]

There are several explanations as to why these change efforts have fallen short of what most persons feel is essential if schools are to keep up with the dramatic developments occurring in the other segments of society. First, some of the proposals for change in education have involved major manipulation of relatively minor variables. Second, there is some reason to believe that education, as a social system, is incapable of change as it is presently conceived.[3] Third, many teachers presently working in education are psychologically unable to change. The first two points are discussed briefly below as a preface to point number three, which is the main thesis of this paper.

What Studies Show

Studies like those by Goldberg and her associates[4] and Schramm,[5] for example, suggest that varying the way youngsters are grouped for instructional purposes or the medium by which information is presented to learners does not typically make a significant difference in the lives and minds of those who are taught. These studies are only illustrative, but any careful study of hundreds of such pieces of research forces one to the same conclusion.[6] Glatthorn's scathing indictment of major curriculum projects makes the point that these courses of study were "designed for the school of the 50's—the 1850's."[7] The fact is, changes which have focused on manipulation of variables, such as modifications of organizational factors, subject matter factors, and presentation factors, have typically not helped children learn more, better, or faster than the "conventional" approaches, even though the proponents have been enthusiastic and effective in securing adherents to their curriculum cause.

The idea that education is incapable of change is more difficult

to demonstrate or articulate, but it basically relates to the failure of the system to insist that evaluative data be used to help the operation improve. Stated simply, educators do not have to do as well as they know. Those who work within the system are not required to base programatic change upon the best and latest data available. The industrial corporation has to pay attention to the feedback data which become available after the buying public assesses the worthwhileness or usefulness of the product or service which is involved. In government, when the courts make judgments about a particular law or the way in which such a law is implemented, the rest of the governmental system has to pay attention to the evaluative feedback. Such a situation simply does not exist in education. Those who are responsible for making policy or for implementing policy pay attention to the evaluative feedback if they want to, or ignore the feedback all together, if they please. "Knowing" that such and such a program, procedure, or plan facilitates learning may or may not be utilized by those responsible for the educational question.

For example, if the proposed change costs more, it may be discarded, even though it helps students learn more effectively than the traditional way. Or, a program may be adopted simply because it is popular, and "all the other districts are doing this, so it must be a good thing." Utilization of language laboratories, for example, represents a very extensive kind of change which has little basis in empirical fact to suggest the change,[10] even though most of the "experts" in the field are convinced of its advantages.

The purpose here is not to argue that the "new" curriculum ventures are not sound, theoretically, or desirable, operationally. They may very well be. The basic point here is that to date very few of the innovations have withstood careful experimental scrutiny and proven, in practice, their superiority to the "traditional" programs or plans.[10] However, changes have been made and have not been made, regardless of the data available, simply because education as a social system has no systematic way to utilize feedback data effectively and creatively to improve.[11]

Although the inability of the educational system to demand action on evaluative feedback and the innovators' failure to manipulate major variables are serious problems, an equally urgent consideration is the psychological inability of many teachers to change. Let us now shift in our discussion to a consideration of that idea.

Some Teachers Cannot Change

Psychologically speaking, some persons are more capable of change than others. Rogers' stasis—process continuum[12] represents one portrayal of this notion. Rogers postulates seven stages to the continuum, ranging from stage one (stasis) in which the individual is unwilling to communicate self, is rigid, does not perceive problems, and has much blockage of internal communications to the other end of the continuum (process) in which the individual experiences feelings, internal communications are clear, and he is open to experience. Another example would be the belief-disbelief system outlined by Rokeach.[13]

The point is, even though many changes in education are legally possible, economically practical, administratively feasible, publicly acceptable, and experimentally defensible, they are not admissable, psychologically, into certain teachers' minds. And no matter what the weight of evidence or argument along the other lines, unless teachers both can and do **receive** the new idea into their own experiential field and **give it meaning** in terms of their own knowledge and feelings and skills, they **cannot** implement an innovation thoughtfully or effectively in any truly professional way.

If this is so, one might argue that curriculum developers and innovators should strive to make the new materials and concepts "teacher proof." Indeed, some innovators state their purposes in exactly those terms—they want the new subject matter, instructional techniques, and media so carefully developed and so rigidly structured that no one, not even a bungling teacher, can negate their efforts.

However one feels about such innovators, the fact of the matter is that such proposals presume that there is only **one** set of materials, **one** way, **one** organizational strategy, or **one** solution to a problem which, by definition, has many facets. Everything that we know about the nature of the human organism forcefully suggests that people are different.[14] Any effort to make them all think or look or act or learn alike is simply naive.

There is no **one** set of mathematics materials or **one** method of teaching foreign language or **one** organizational pattern or **one** instructional technique which is **best** for every child. Those teachers and those educational systems which are most effective are those most capable of adapting and fitting the curriculum and the contrived experience to the growing child. The ability to sort out the nuances of students' motivations and ability and other behaviors demands an openness on the part of the teacher. Psychologically, he must be capable of perceiving new stimuli and new ideas which come his way, or he will never be in a position to employ such a proposed change deliberately or uniquely or creatively to match any particular student's learning needs.

Thus the dilemma is born. New concepts, techniques, and media are only useful to those who are psychologically capable of perceiving the proposed educational changes. If they are defensive, closed, inadequate, and fearful, they will not be able to get the new idea "inside" their central nervous system to give it new meaning for them. Unless they can do this, the innovation can only be utilized mechanically and unthinkingly, or not at all.

Everything that we know about the nature of the human personality suggests that people vary in

terms of their openness to experience. Some are more open and some are more closed.[16, 17, 18, 19] Statistically, most persons probably fall somewhere in between. If we are seriously concerned about encouraging rational, effective change in education, then it is imperative that we face up to the problem of the change capabilities of the professional persons who work to make the educational enterprise go. Stated another way, unless those who are called upon to implement educational innovations are psychologically able to entertain such innovations, significant change simply will not—in fact; cannot —occur. We could hypothesize that the extent of meaningful and effective change which takes place would occur in direct proportion to the "openness" of the professional staff involved.

Casting these ideas in research terms opens up an entire problem area for those interested in pursuing the matter empirically. However, we already know enough in terms of personality theory and the theory of change to state that, unless we intend to **impose** change upon those who are participants in the educational enterprise, the only alternative is to **encourage** them to change through experience with the unique and the new. This requires us to deal directly with the personalities of the professionals who are involved.

What Can We Do?

Theoretically, we can attract in, improve upon, or eliminate teachers from the profession according to their individual personality structure and perceptual style. That is, if we can draw into the profession those persons who are psychologically open, help those now in the profession become still more open, and ultimately keep out or eject from the professional group those persons who are closed to experience, then, innovation in education could get a "real trial."

What is being suggested, of course, is that membership in the profession be determined, at least in part, according to one's personality. Greenwood makes the point precisely when he states:

> One of the principal functions of the professional schools is to identify and screen individuals who are prospective deviants from the professional culture. That is why the admission of candidates to professional education must be judged on grounds in addition to and other than their academic qualifications. Psychic factors presaging favorable adjustment to the professional culture are granted an importance equivalent to mental abilities.[20]

Greenwood makes his point in terms of social workers, but the concept applies to education equally, especially today. For education today demands professional people who are capable of growth, adaptation, and change. Those not capable of change must be denied admission to the professional group or ejected from it if they already belong.

That is a strong statement, but it is the only tenable position if we are seriously concerned about improving education through change. To change education for the better, the operation must be in the hands of people who are psychologically capable of change.

Telling, demanding, imposing, and requiring were appropriate techniques in a static society, but in a dynamic, changing social order we absolutely have to have people within the educational system who are flexible, adaptive, open, perceptive persons. Without these qualities they cannot even consider proposals for change because, psychologically, the proposals are "screened out"— they are actually "kept away."

The case seems clear. Either we find a way to attract into the profession and retain those persons capable of further growth and capable of incorporating innovations and change proposals into their experimental mode, or education as an institution will wither and die. Further, we must either "keep out" or "kick out" those persons who are closed or who become closed over the years, for any reason at all. While we need to have compassion and concern for these people as people, we must deny them an opportunity to play any important professional role in education if we are hopeful that education might improve through change.

The Practical Problems

The basic idea being developed here is that meaningful and effective change in education is possible only if the people who serve in professional roles in the educational enterprise are themselves psychologically able to change. In practical terms, this means that at various points along the route to becoming a professional educator, **somebody** has to make **decisions** relative to accepting or rejecting people into the next phase of the professional preparation program or into the profession itself. Such decisions should be made by the profession, rather than a non-professional or governmental or other group. Following is a "professional" time line, with certain suggestions regarding what might constitute appropriate points and procedures along the way to determine admission to a professional career in education. At least seven points can be identified:

1. Admission to college or university work
2. Admission to teacher education program
3. Admission to student teaching
4. Receive degree in education
5. Receiving certificate to teach
6. Admission to a professional position
7. Admission to advanced training or further degree program

Point number two, admission to a teacher education program, requires assessments regarding a prospective teacher's **potential** for growth and change. Point number three, admission to student teaching, requires assessments regarding **potential** and **performance** in relationship to growth and change. Points number four and five both require evaluations which pertain to **performance** regarding growth and change. The same is true for points six

and seven, and, although concern for potential is always important as far as personality structure and psychological capacity for growth and change is concerned, the prospective teacher probably never will demonstrate these qualities if he has not done so by the time he has completed his professional program.

In the past, many teacher educators hoped that prospective teachers would be able to modify their personality through experience on the job. They permitted such persons to move forward because they felt this was probably best **for them** as individuals. Consideration for the feelings and concerns of prospective teachers is important, but not at the expense of the children they will teach. Difficult as it is, teacher educators and the profession at large have to work to draw a line at which they will admit some persons to educational practice, but not others. One criterion in drawing that line must be: "Is this person open and capable of change?" Other factors are important, but every effort must be made to screen out those persons whose psychological makeup is such that they cannot entertain innovative ideas and propositions for change.

Conclusion

Not every change proposal should be adopted, nor even tried. Change in education, though, requires people who are capable of considering the innovative and the different and the new. The world is turning, life is moving, and things are happening with fantastic speed. The professional in education must be open to experience. He must be able to receive and then to perceive and finally to act upon suggestions regarding change. This can happen only if he is perceptually uninhibited, personally secure, and psychologically adequate. It takes competent people to effect educational change, and competence must be reflected in personality structure, as well as mental ability or achievement in academic ways. The task is clear. The means are meagre. The time to start is now.

Jack R. Frymier

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[1] Matthew Miles (Ed.) **Innovation in Education.** (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University), 1964.

[2] Allan A. Glatthorn. "Curriculum Reform Has Failed In Three Important Ways," **NASSP Bulletin** (May, 1968).

[3] Jack R. Frymier. **A Rationale for Educational Change.** (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Books), in press.

[4] Miriam L. Goldberg, **et al. The Effects of Ability Grouping.** (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University), 1956.

[5] Wilbur Schramm. "Learning From Instructional Television," **Review of Educational Research.** XXXII (April, 1962).

[6] Frymier, **Ibid.**

[7] Glatthorn, **Ibid.**

[8] Philip Smith and E. Berger. **An Assessment of Three Foreign Language Strategies Utilizing Three Language Laboratory Systems.** (West Chester, Pennsylvania: Foreign Language Research Center), 1968

[9] Raymond Keating. **A Study of the Effectiveness of Language Laboratories.** (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University), 1963.

[10] Miles, **Ibid.**, p. 657.

[11] Frymier, **Ibid.**

[12] Carl R. Rogers. **On Becoming a Person.** (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.), 1961, Chapter Seven.

[13] Milton Rokeach. **The Open and Closed Mind.** (New York: Basic Books, Inc.), 1960, Chapter One.

[14] Arthur W. Combs and Donald Snygg. **Individual Behavior.** (New York: Harper and Bros.), 1957, Rev. Ed.

[15] Earl C. Kelley and Marie I. Rasey. **Education and the Nature of Men.** (New York: Harper and Bros.), 1952.

[16] T. W. Adams, **et al. The Authoritarian Personality.** (New York: Harper and Bros.), 1950.

[17] Erick Fromm. **The Heart of Man.** (New York: Harper and Bros.), 1964.

[18] Jack R. Frymier. **The Nature of Educational Method.** (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc.), 1965, Chapter Two.

[19] Combs and Syngg, **Ibid.**

[20] Ernest Greenwood, "Attributes of a Profession," **Social Work** II (July, 1957), 44-55 as reprinted in Howard M. Vollmer and Donald L. Mills (Eds.) **Professionalism.** (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), 1966, p. 10.

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